

Crown Hill Cemetery Chapel and Vault
Crown Hill Cemetery opposite 34th Street
Indianapolis
Marion County
Indiana

HABS No. IND-58

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. IND-58

CROWN HILL CEMETERY CHAPEL AND VAULT

Location: Cemetery entrance is at 3402 Boulevard Place, Indianapolis, Marion County, Indiana.

The Chapel and Vault are located west of the main entrance at the center of the cemetery.

Present Owner: The Crown Hill Cemetery, an Indiana Not-for-Profit Corporation 700 West 38th Street, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Present Use: Funeral chapel and crypt.

Statement of Significance: The Crown Hill Cemetery Chapel was designed by Indianapolis architect and builder, D. A. Bohlen. The romantic landscape design of the cemetery provides an appropriate setting for this high Victorian Gothic style chapel.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Dates of erection: 1875-1877 (Secretary's Record, 1863-1894, pp. 223, 243, 255, 259); 1917 addition (Interview with Howard Wood); 1971 remodeling (Interview with H. Roll McLaughlin).
 2. Architect: D. A. Bohlen (Secretary's Record, p. 223). D. A. Bohlen, was born near Hanover, Germany. He studied in Holzminden, then walked through northern Germany and Poland sketching and observing construction methods. He worked in Europe, then came to the United States in 1852, worked shortly in Francis Constigan's office, and then opened his own office. In Indianapolis, he was also the architect of Tomlinson Hall, the Market House (HABS IND-59), St. John's Cathedral, and the Roberts Park Church (Burns, Early Architects p. 200) (Journals of the Common Council, 1886, p. 457).
- D. A. Bohlen and Son were architects for the 1917 apse addition; and James Associates were architects for the 1971 remodeling.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The Crown Hill Association was formally organized on September 25, 1863. The initial purchases consisted of the following grants of land to the Crown Hill Association: October 1863, 40 acres from James

Trueblood; October 1863, 40 acres from Jonathan Wilson; December 1863, 160 acres from Martin Williams; March 1864, 6 acres from Henry Wright; March 1864, 22 acres from H. and L. Wright.

The beauty of the hill then known as Strawberry Hill and now known as Crown Hill, prompted the selection of this locality for the cemetery. The hill is on Martin Williams' property. (Nicholas, The Story of Crown Hill, pp. 14-15).

4. Builders or contractor, suppliers: John Hinchcliffe was the general contractor (Secretary's Record 1863-1894, pp. 223, 230).
5. Original plan and construction of building: Drawings for the original building are in possession of the architectural firm of Bohlen, Meyer, Gibson and Associates. These drawings are on opaque paper, seven sheets, poched in colors. The central portion of the building was a chapel and was entered at the east (narrow) end. The plan of the chapel was originally a simple rectangle. At either side, with axes perpendicular to that of the chapel, were the crypts. At each side of each crypt were tiered storage compartments for caskets - four compartments for caskets - four compartments wide and three compartments high (architects' drawings, Bohlen, Meyer, Gibson and Associates).

Construction of "a new vault" is first mentioned on March 10, 1874 in the minutes of the Board of Managers. (Nicholas, The Story of Crown Hill, p. 199). On January 7, the construction is described as "a new vault in the hillside with capacity to hold fifty bodies," and it had been decided that D. A. Bohlen was to be the architect (Secretary's Record, 1863-1894, p. 217). The scope of the plans increased, for on March 16, 1875 F. W. Chislett, the superintendent of the cemetery, and Bohlen visited Cincinnati and Louisville "for the purpose of maturing plans and specifications for a vault and chapel to be reported to this board for examination to cost not over thirty thousand dollars" (Secretary's Record, 1863-1894, p. 218). At the May 25, 1875 meeting, Bohlen's plans were adopted (Secretary's Record, 1863-1894, p. 221). The purpose of the chapel was to "supply a much needed place for funeral services in inclement weather." (Secretary's Record, 1863-1894, p. 223).

John Hinchcliffe's bid to build the building for \$34,768.00 was accepted on June 15, 1875 and a \$10,000 performance bond was required of him, which he executed. Fifteen percent of the contract price was to be reserved until completion of the work (Secretary's Record, 1863-1894, pp. 223, 230).

In the following year, on June 16, \$23,569 had been spent (Secretary's Record, 1863-1894, p. 242). In December 1876 the Board of Managers set up the charges for the use of the vault at \$5 for the first month or franchised part and \$10 per month afterward. (Secretary's Record, 1863-1894, p. 251). It seems evident that delay in burial arrangements was not encouraged.

On April 10, 1877 Bohlen's final bill for services "in building and supervising the vault and chapel was presented." The Board charged one of their members with the task of talking Bohlen into settling for less, but at the following meeting it was reported that Bohlen stood firm and collected the full \$971 of his fee (Secretary's Record, 1863-1894, pp. 255, 257). At the June 5, 1877 meeting of the Board of Corporators the completion of the chapel was announced. The total cost had come to \$38,922, and it was entirely paid for. "It is a beautiful and enduring structure, having capacity for storing ninety-six caskets and is conveniently designed for chapel services when desired." (Secretary's Record, 1863-1894, p. 259).

6. Alterations and additions: The firm of D. A. Bohlen and Son were architects for the first alteration of the building. Their drawings, dated March 12, 1917, are in possession of Bohlen, Meyer, Gibson and Associates. At the west end of the chapel a polygonal apse was added with three leaded-glass windows. Behind the apse, one-story toilet facilities were built, and a boiler room was added in the cellar for heating. Materials and construction of the addition matched the original building (Architects' drawings at Bohlen, Meyer, Gibson & Associates).

At the present writing, James Associates, Architects have designed and are supervising a second remodeling of the building (Interview with H. Roll McLaughlin). A new roofing of flat, glazed green tile has been installed with copper and lead flashing. The storage vaults in the crypt have been removed and steel beams placed to support the brick vaulting and the segmental arches. A doorway has been cut through the west wall of the south crypt presently revealing the wall construction. Floor drains have been installed in the crypt spaces.

After remodeling, the chapel will be used for funeral services. Following the services the casket will be moved to one of the crypts and left there until such time as scheduled for burial using modern mechanized equipment. The mourners will not go to the grave unless they specifically request to do so. This arrangement allows efficient use of cemetery workers' time, for they are not required to be on hand to await conclusion of funeral services. (Interview with Howard Wood).

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

From the time of its dedication in 1864 the Crown Hill Cemetery was considered to be the most fashionable burial ground in Indianapolis. The graves of most of the prominent people of the city are to be found here. See also Crown Hill Cemetery, Office Building (IND-56) and Crown Hill Cemetery, Gateway (IND-57).

C. Sources of Information:

1. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Secretary's Record, 1863-1894 (Proceedings of the Incorporators and Directors of Crown Hill Cemetery). At the present Crown Hill Cemetery Office, 700 West 38th Street, Indianapolis.

Interview with Howard Wood, Executive Director of the Crown Hill Cemetery, July 22, 1971.

Architects' drawings at Bohlen, Meyer, Gibson & Associates, 3000 Meadows Parkway, Indianapolis.

Interview with H. Roll McLaughlin of James Associates, July 22, 1971.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Burns, Lee, Early Architects and Builders of Indiana. Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, 1935.

City of Indianapolis, Indiana. Journals of the Common Council, 1886, Board of Aldermen & Joint Conventions of Said Bodies for the Year 1886. Indianapolis, 1887.

Nicholas, Anna, The Story of Crown Hill, Indianapolis, 1928.

Prepared by Wesley I. Shank
Architectural Historian
National Park Service
August, 1971

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Excellent example of High Victorian Gothic architecture.
2. Condition of fabric: Very good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Cruciform plan, approximately 50' (seven-bay east front) x 65' (three bays), the central chapel is an open two-story space. The transepts containing the vaults are one story.
2. Foundations: Limestone.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Light grey limestone. Most of the wall surface is rough-faced ashlar. Quoins, buttresses, door & window frames, gable trim, etc., are smooth-faced ashlar. Crypts at either side contain a separate interior structure of brickwork separated by an air space of about two inches from the limestone wall and vented to this space.
4. Structural system, framing: Central portion is vaulted in three bays at ceiling. Floor system here is vaulted over the cellar. Crypts had pointed tunnel vault at center and segmental arches spanning three tiers of crypts at each side. In 1971 steel beams were installed to support the arches leaving a clear floor area.
5. Chimneys: None.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance is a large compound pointed arch flanked by engaged columns. Wooden paneled double doors, dark hardwood.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Paired-lancet windows predominate. They have stone tracery and leaded stained glass. A rose window is placed on the front (east side) of the chapel. The three windows of the apse enclose trefoil sash.
7. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Both the tall central chapel and the lower crypts have gabled roofs. Flat tile roofing, green enameled surface (1971) formerly slate cut in fish-scale pattern.

- b. Cornice, Eaves: Copper flashing. Stone gutters. Stone spouts at ends of crypt gutters.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: Stone pinnacles with crockets at all corners of the building.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plans: The Chapel and Vault form a cruciform plan. The chapel is oriented on an east-west axis and is flanked by two vaults oriented on a north-south axis. The central chapel has an open two-story space while the vaults are one story. Behind the apse, under a low roof, are two toilets. There is a cellar beneath the chapel.
- 2. Stairways: Access to the cellar is by an exterior stair at the rear of the building.
- 3. Flooring: In central portion, black & white marble squares (about 1 foot square) in modified checkerboard pattern laid 45 degrees to walls.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish:
 - a. Central portion: carved limestone. Vaulted ceiling of pointed ribbed vaults, rectangular in plan.
 - b. Crypt portions: painted brick. Vaulted ceiling of pointed tunnel vaulting.
- 5. Doorways and doors: Sliding double doors between central portion and two crypt areas at each side. Paneled, dark hardwood.
- 6. Notable hardware: Sliding door tracks and hardware.
- 7. Mechanical equipment: Formerly radiators on walls of central portion. None in crypts. Electric lighting in crypts.

D. Site:

- 1. General setting and orientation: Facade faces east, apse faces west. The chapel is located directly west of the cemetery entrance at the center of the cemetery.
- 2. Historic landscape design: The whole cemetery is a significant example of picturesque landscape design.
- 3. Related structures: There is an entrance gate and porter's

lodge (HABS No. IND-57) and an office building (HABS No. IND-58) at the intersection of 34th Street and Boulevard Place. See the individual HABS reports on these structures for further information.

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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of a cooperatively financed project in 1970 between the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana and the Historic American Buildings Survey.

The project was under the general direction of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Measured drawings were prepared by student architects under the direction of Professor David R. Hermansen of Ball State University, Muncie Indiana. Professor Wesley I. Shank of Iowa State University prepared the historical data, and Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer, provided the photographic record. H. Roll McLaughlin, FAIA, State Preservation Coordinator, President of the Historic Landmarks Foundation, and member of the HABS Advisory Board, served as consultant throughout the project. This report was edited for HABS in 1976 by Candace Reed.